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Viewing cable 03KUWAIT5129, C) SAYED BAHR AL-OLOUM TELLS AMBASSADOR IRAQIS

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
03KUWAIT5129	2003-11-10 05:26	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Kuwait

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/10172>
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This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 005129

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ARP, NEA/NGA, INR/NESA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/05/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [SA](#) [SY](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: (C) SAYED BAHR AL-OLOUM TELLS AMBASSADOR IRAQIS
MUST BE OUT FRONT, COALITION "BEHIND THE CURTAINS"

Classified By: AMB. RICHARD H. JONES; REASON 1.5 (B,D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: IGC member Sayed Mohammed Bahr al-Oloum told the Ambassador November 5 that our success in Iraq is very important to him, but that it requires changing policy so as to give the impression that Iraqis are ruling themselves, with the Coalition providing strong but discreet support from "behind the curtains." He praised CPA Administrator Bremer as a friend whom he respects, but said the Coalition must show greater understanding of the Iraqi mentality. He also urged that pressure on Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia be relaxed until Iraq is stabilized. He argued that it is unrealistic to draft a constitution by mid-2004 given the prevailing insecurity. He favored full nationwide election of delegates to the constitutional convention, but acknowledged that others disagree, and he affirmed the need

to ensure adequate representation of all religious and ethnic groups. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) At the latter's request, the Ambassador met on November 5 with Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) member Sayed Mohammed Bahr al-Oloum (MBO), who was visiting Kuwait to take part in a series of Ramadan festivities. Mohammed Hussein Bahr al-Oloum served as interpreter. Pol Chief sat in as Notetaker. MBO began by saying that Kuwaiti Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmed had repeatedly urged him to speak openly with the Ambassador, both because of his knowledge and perspective and because he would soon be going to Iraq. He stressed "it is very important to us that America succeed in Iraq" and praised CPA Administrator Bremer as a good friend whom he respects. He said personal security in Iraq has improved "75 percent": five months ago, all shops were closed and the streets deserted by 6 p.m.; now, shops are open and the streets busy until after midnight. Political security is the big problem, he went on, and "it targets us and you together." He summarized the situation as follows: various groups are behind these attacks -- Saddam loyalists, Al-Qaeda, and neighboring states that feel threatened by the US presence in Iraq, namely Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Moqtada Sadr "is nothing" and cannot be considered a religious authority, but he is being used by people who want to undermine the Coalition. The population will not accept the return of Saddam. The great danger is Al-Qaeda, which "threatens us all." The South, "as we promised," is being kept under control by religious authorities, who will not accept civil war or sectarian conflict. Sunni extremists are trying to provoke conflict, as in the assassination of Ayatollah Mohammed Baqer al-Hakim, an act that "is not in the Iraqi nature" and required capabilities that point to external involvement.

13. (C) MBO stressed that he did not want the US to hasten its departure from Iraq -- that would "leave us in the middle of the sea without a boat. He said he had long believed that only the US could rid Iraq of Saddam, and had told the Iraqis this. He vowed "we must teach our children" that America liberated Iraq. However, the urgent need now is to restore security, and for that "you must change your policy." He said it had been a big mistake to dissolve the army and security forces. A new army cannot be built in one year. He urged a "reduction of US pressure" on Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia, which he implied were interfering in Iraq to keep US forces busy there, until Iraq is stabilized. Above all, "give the impression that Iraqis are ruling themselves"; keep the US presence "behind the curtains." Pay Iraqi security forces more (now, he said, an Iraqi policeman makes \$150/month whereas an American makes \$3 - 4,000). Give the IGC responsibility for security, and the capacity to carry it out. Treat Iraqis with respect and be sensitive to their feelings -- for instance, keep the newsmedia away from retirees waiting in line to receive their pensions; try not to kick the door in when searching a house. Recognize that Iraqis are experiencing freedom for the first time in 35 years; it is only natural that they protest because they can.

14. (C) MBO complained that the IGC still has no budget: he found it demeaning to have to go hat in hand to the CPA for everything -- and often not get it. He recalled that the CPA had promised to provide IGC members with armored vehicles, but this promise had not been implemented.

15. (C) Constitutional Timetable: MBO noted that UNSCR 1511 called for the IGC to submit a timetable for the constitutional process. He argued that it was unrealistic to draft a new constitution by mid-2004: political leaders need to consult their constituents, and this is difficult to impossible given the prevailing insecurity. "We want a permanent constitution, with democracy, federalism and freedom," not another temporary constitution as has been the case since 1958. The constitution "must respect our Arab, Muslim and distinctly Iraqi identity," he said. Iraqi democracy cannot be a slavish copy of a Western model; it must be tailored to Iraq's unique history and culture. "We need Arab and Muslim support, but of all our neighbors, only Kuwait is with us. Iran and Turkey never will be." MBO said that he, like the Shia majority, favored choosing the delegates to the constitutional convention by a full nationwide election; that said, he affirmed the need to ensure adequate representation of all religious and ethnic groups, and acknowledged that others disagreed on how to ensure this: the Kurds wanted regional elections, and Iyad Allawi wanted the delegates to be appointed. MBO wished the IGC had comprised 50 members instead of 25, in order to be more broadly representative: at present, Samawa and Nasiriya are not represented on the IGC, for instance. He wished there had been 10 women named to the Council instead of 3.

16. (C) Summing up, MBO said:

-- the CPA must understand the Iraqi mentality;

-- Iraqis must be seen to be ruling themselves, with the Coalition discreetly (but strongly) behind them;

-- pressure on Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia should be relaxed until Iraq is stabilized.

17. (C) The Ambassador told MBO that he expected to be joining Amb. Bremer in Baghdad before the end of Ramadhan. He pledged to try to listen to as many Iraqis as he could, and to reassure everyone that we respect the Iraqi people, want to be friends and do the right thing, and have no long-term desire to stay in Iraq. (MBO interjected "don't talk about this point.") He said America can contribute much knowledge gained from its experience at finding fair compromises; MBO agreed.

18. (C) Bio Note: MBO spoke almost entirely in Arabic, except for a few courtesy phrases. He came across as a kindly grandfatherly figure, but also as a dignified and gracious eminence accustomed to being venerated, and to being heeded.

19. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
JONES